

Civil War Book Review

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Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era

Al Neale

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Review

Neale, Al

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Kelly, Bruce C., Editor and Snell, Mark A., Editor. *Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era*. University of Missouri Press, \$44.95 ISBN 826215386

Multi-layered meaning

Historical music strikes a chord with modern readers

Music performs a variety of important functions in human cultures. Today, some of these functions are so subtle that we are hardly aware of them or we simply take them for granted. Before the invention of mechanical recording devices and commercial radio broadcasting, people would not have taken music for granted. When we increase our awareness of how music affects us personally, we begin to better understand people of the past who experienced the same or similar responses to their music. Song provides a good example. Song may be our most emotional art form because it combines poetry with melodies in a way that can have deep emotional connections for the listener. When we become aware of the feelings that certain songs evoke for us today, we can begin to understand how people of the past responded to the songs of their day and the feelings those songs inspired. We can also sense how music provides a connection between their feelings and ours.

Americans of the Civil War era participated in a rich musical culture that can not be overlooked. Their musical experiences are relevant for us today, and **Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era** helps us understand those experiences. This anthology of well researched essays offers something for anyone interested in Civil War era music. The work makes a significant contribution toward filling a void in our understanding of the diverse musical culture of that age. Each of the ten essays explores a different aspect of popular music, or music printed for performance by literate people. The book is a product of the National Conference on Music of the Civil War Era that explored the effects of the Civil War on music and musicians. It serves as an

initial attempt toward a comprehensive investigation of the music and the musicians of the Civil War era. The various scholars shared their research in essays on a variety of musical topics as a step toward an interdisciplinary model for future research. Each essay provides information that will be welcomed by social historians, musicians, and Civil War enthusiasts.

In his overview, co-editor Bruce C. Kelly identified ten broad categories for the organization of research on Civil War era music. The anthology provides valuable information that falls within each of the categories, but it focuses mostly on: Music Personalities, Popular Song and Dance, Music and Culture, Military and Civilian Bands, Music Publishing, and Collection and Description. Categories only lightly touched on include: European Art Music, African American Music and Musicians, Innovations, and New Beginnings.

The essay by Kirsten M. Schultz analyzes the production and consumption of Confederate songsters. Her essay is especially helpful because it summarizes much of her findings into four functions that songster lyrics performed for Civil War soldiers. She wrote that song lyrics helped soldiers to entertain themselves, to express their emotions in a culturally acceptable manner, to proclaim shared values, and to strengthen their ties to their comrades, family, community, or country. Her summary helps us understand the functions of music, both popular and oral tradition, in our past and in today's popular music culture. Schultz also offers the reader a deeper understanding of the significance of songs when she wrote that they acquire layers of meaning for the listener. It should be easy for us to connect the notion of layers of meaning in songs of the Civil War era with our own sense of the feelings and thoughts that certain songs evoke in us today.

Deane L. Root's essay about music and community also makes a large contribution to our understanding of the functions of music in the past and the present. He concluded that the music of the Civil War era had a powerful role in expressing shared experiences, dreams, ideals, and beliefs among communities of people, and that, it had a major role in the community-building strategies of the era. He cites examples in Stephen Foster's minstrel melodies. Both Schultz and Root help the reader understand that the musical experiences of the people of the Civil War era are relevant to our own musical experiences, and this musical connection provides a path toward understanding the lives of people of the past.

Micheal Saffle's essay on Irish American Music contains a wealth of information about this very important component of our musical heritage. But it goes a step further in presenting a seven-part framework to use in analyzing a tune to determine its Irishness. His seven traits of Irish music serve as a guide to help the reader recognize and understand a form of music that has had a large influence on both our popular song and on our singing and dancing from the oral tradition.

Other essays in the anthology cover such topics as: images of women contained in the lyrics of Civil War songs, military bands, Southern piano music during the Civil War, the composer Henry Clay Work, music of the common soldier, and music inspired by the battle of Gettysburg. The broad scope of these ten essays makes this a highly productive initial step toward a comprehensive investigation of Civil War era music.

Within the four research categories that were only lightly explored, Bruce Kelly raises important questions for future research. For example, he asks how Civil War era Americans received the Romantic period music of that day and how its performance and reception were impacted by the war. He also raises a variety of intriguing questions about African-American music and its function during that era. Also of interest are questions about the intermingling of musical cultures that occurred during the war and the new musical styles that resulted. These and other important queries raise the hope that the contributors to this initial volume will continue their research and publish a second volume. If a second volume is contemplated, an area also deserving special attention is Civil War era oral tradition music, or music transmitted among performers and listeners solely through hearing and without the benefit of written compositions.

As Kelly noted, the book is not the final word on Civil War era music. There never will be a final word, only the quest for a deeper and wider understanding of this vital aspect of our shared experience.

Al Neale is Chief of Education and Visitor Services at Pamplin Historical Park and The National Museum of the Civil War Soldier. He is a musician who performs on a variety of period instruments and who specializes in teaching American history by incorporating period music. He can be contacted at alneale@comcast.net